

# Policy and Procedure Manual For Advocates



Serving Jasper, Newton, and Benton Counties

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## **Welcome to Crossroads CASA!**

Dear Advocate,

Crossroads CASA is pleased to welcome you as a volunteer with our program. Since 2009, Crossroads CASA has advocated for children in our court and welfare systems. Therefore, as a volunteer, you are a critical component in the advocacy efforts of this program.

This manual will provide you with the policies and procedures of our CASA program which serves Jasper, Newton, and Benton counties. This manual is not a contract and does not guarantee any fixed terms and conditions of a volunteer's participation in the CASA program. It is information that we would like you to become familiar with and follow because your commitment to these policies and procedures will make Crossroads CASA Program stronger and more effective. It will also help us maintain a level of professionalism, which is an integral part of CASA.

Your service as a volunteer will last for the life of a case. However, Crossroads CASA Program is looking forward to having a long and beneficial relationship with you and all of our advocates.

We encourage any suggestions you may have for improving our services or our policies and procedures. We have an "open door" policy. Therefore, if you have any problems or questions concerning the policies and procedures set forth, we want you to feel comfortable enough to take the matter up directly with me.

Thank you for making a difference.

Sincerely,

Katie Hall  
Crossroads CASA Director

## **Important Contact Information**

### *Crossroads CASA Office*

Director: Katie Hall

Address: 910 S. Sparling Ave. Rensselaer, IN. 47978

Office Phone: (219) 866-0843

Director's Personal Cell Phone Number: (574) 870-2295

Director's Work Cell Phone Number: (219) 866-1617

Fax: (219) 866-0852

E-mail Addresses: [crossroadscasa@hotmail.com](mailto:crossroadscasa@hotmail.com) or [Katie.hall@co.jasper.in.us](mailto:Katie.hall@co.jasper.in.us)

### *Jasper County Courts*

Jasper Circuit Court

Judge John D. Potter

Address: 115 West Washington Street; Ste 320 Rensselaer, IN. 47978

Phone: (219) 866-7766

Fax: (219) 866-4943

Jasper Superior Court

Judge James Ahler

Address: 115 West Washington Street, Ste 300 Rensselaer, IN. 47978

Phone: (219) 866-4971

Fax: (219) 866-4988

### *Newton Circuit Court*

Judge Jeryl (Jerry) F. Leach

Address: 201 N. Third Street PO Box 101 Kentland, IN. 47951

Phone: (219) 474-5131

Fax: (219) 474-6751

### *Benton Circuit Court*

Judge Rex Kepner

Address: 706 East 5<sup>th</sup> Street Fowler, IN. 47944

Phone: (765) 884-0370

Fax: (765) 884-2027

**Important Contact Information Continued:**

Child Abuse Hotline Number (for reporting abuse/neglect only): 1-800-800-5556

*Jasper County DCS*

105 Drexel Parkway, Suite 2

P.O. Box 279

Rensselaer, IN 47978

219 866-4186

Local Director: Sharon Mathews

*Newton County DCS*

4117 S. 240 W., Suite 200A

Morocco, IN 47963

219-285-2206

Local Director: Ron Fisher

*Benton County DCS*

307 E. 6<sup>th</sup> Street

P.O. Box 226

Fowler, IN 47944-0026

765 884-0120

Local Director: Laura Zimmerman

## **Program Policies and Procedures**

### **Purpose of Policies and Procedures**

The purpose of these policies and procedures is to provide overall guidance and direction to advocates serving. They do not constitute either implicitly or explicitly, a binding contractual or personnel agreement. Crossroads CASA reserves the right to change any of these policies and procedures at any time and expect adherence to the changed policy. Areas not specifically addressed by these policies and procedures shall be determined by the Director and/or the Judge. Volunteers will be required to sign an acknowledgment indicating that they have read, understood, and will comply with all policies and procedures. Volunteers will be notified of any changes made to this policy and procedure manual.

Under particular circumstances, certain exceptions may be made to the policies and procedures of this program. Such exceptions will be made at the discretion of the Director and/or Judge.

### **Mission Statement**

Crossroads CASA advocates for abused and neglected children in Jasper, Newton, and Benton Counties. Our mission is to recruit, train, supervise, and support quality volunteers whose task is to advocate for the timely and safe placement of abused and neglected children. CASA volunteers speak for the best interests of children in the courts, and advocate for each child to have a safe, permanent home.

### **Program History**

The CASA concept was first implemented by Judge David Soukup of Seattle, Washington in 1977. As of 2012, CASA has grown to include over 933 member programs. An estimated 77,000 volunteers are becoming the voice for approximately 234,000 abused and neglected children yearly.

Crossroads CASA was established in 2009 with the vision of Judge John D. Potter and went by the name Jasper County CASA. As the program grew in 2010, Newton County and Judge Jeryl F. Leach came on board to make Jasper and Newton County CASA program possible. In 2013, Judge Rex Kepner and Benton County joined our multi-county program and our name was changed to Crossroads CASA. It was also in October 1, 2013 that Crossroads CASA changed from an umbrella form of management to being overseen by the Circuit Courts which is still the current program structure today.

### **Legal Authority**

CASA is legally sanctioned through IC 33-24-6-4. This legislation establishes a state County Appointed Special Advocate office and appropriates funds to counties who administer a CASA program. In addition, Indiana Code covers mandatory appointment of CASA in CHINS case.

(IC 31-24-10-3)

### **Administrative Structure**

Crossroads CASA is under a court program structure and officially under the Jasper Circuit Court. This means that the Director is considered a county government employee. Crossroads CASA will put in place a 501-C3 Fundraising Board / Advisory Board. This will consist of board members nominated and appointed by the Jasper, Newton, and Benton County Judges. The areas which the board will focus on but not limited to: fundraising activities, community awareness, volunteer recruitment, reviewing data, and other tasks deemed appropriate. The board will meet quarterly or on an as needed basis.

### **Volunteer Liability**

Indiana Code 31-34-10-3 states that, except for gross misconduct, if the CASA program performs duties in good faith they are immune from any civil liability that may occur as a result of their performance during the time they are acting within the duties of a CASA program. Additionally, IC 31-33-6-1 states that a person, other than a person accused of child abuse or neglect, who: makes or causes to be made a report of a child who may be a victim of child abuse or neglect; is a health care provider and detains a child for purposes of causing photographs, x-rays, or a physical medical examination to be made under IC 31-33-10; makes any other report of a child who may be a victim of child abuse and neglect; or participates in any judicial proceeding or other proceeding:

(A) resulting from a report that a child may be a victim of child abuse or neglect; or

(B) relating to the subject matter of the report;

is immune from any civil or criminal liability that might otherwise be imposed because of such actions.

### **Discrimination**

Crossroads CASA promotes equal opportunities to all applicants, employees, advocates, and cases by prohibiting discriminatory policies concerning any individual or group based upon race, religious creed, national origin, sexual orientation, physical or mental disability, color, gender, age, marital status, political affiliation, or veteran status.

Staff and advocates are admonished that racial slurs, ethnic jokes, or other disparaging remarks or conduct based on race, religious creed, national origin, sexual orientation, physical or mental disability, color, gender, age, marital status, political affiliation, or veteran status are never appropriate.

Crossroads CASA will take prompt and immediate action to investigate instances of reported misconduct. Any employee or advocate found to be in violation of this policy will be subject to disciplinary action, up to and including termination from Crossroads CASA.

### **Sexual Harassment**

Crossroads CASA program affirms that all women and men are to be treated fairly and equally, with dignity and respect. We strive to achieve a working environment that is professional and supportive to all individuals. Intimate relationships between advocates, employees, and/or parties of a case are strictly prohibited.

Sexual harassment is defined to be any unsolicited behavior, which asserts a person's sex as a factor of his/her function as an employee or advocate. It includes any unwanted sexual behavior, comments, suggestions, physical contact; propositions backed by implied or actual threats of losing or lowering work, and/or forced sexual relations. Sexual harassment does not include personal compliments welcomed by the recipient, or social interactions or relationships freely entered into by the individuals involved.

Crossroads CASA will take prompt and immediate action to investigate instances of reported misconduct. Any employee or advocate found to be in violation of this policy will be subject to disciplinary action, up to and including termination from Crossroads CASA.

### **Alcohol/Drug Use**

Crossroads CASA is committed to providing an environment that is safe. Staff and advocates are role models for children and families which we serve. Crossroads CASA endorses the philosophy that the workplace should be free from the detrimental effects of alcohol and/or illegal drugs. There will be no differentiation between someone who illegally uses drugs and someone that sells or distributes drugs.

Being under the influence of alcohol and/or drugs is prohibited and is cause for disciplinary action up to and including termination from Crossroads CASA.

### **Advocate's File**

An advocate may have access to his/her volunteer file by request at the CASA office. Advocates are required to submit changes of personal information within one week (7 days) of the information change. This includes but not limited to: address, e-mail, phone numbers, name change, etc. Any additions, deletions, or corrections to the records requested by the advocate will be reviewed by the Director and appropriate parties will be notified of changes.

### **Advocate Training**

Crossroads CASA provides volunteers with at least thirty hours of initial training before being sworn-in as advocates. Topics include but not limited to: roles and responsibilities, permanency planning, confidentiality, cultural awareness, child abuse and neglect, court process, and observation of court proceedings. Training conversations should be kept confidential as actual case situations may be discussed to allow the volunteer relate better to a particular topic. All volunteers must complete the initial thirty hours before becoming a CASA volunteer.



### **Advocate Training Continued**

Upon successful completion of training, the volunteer will be sworn-in as a Court Appointed Special Advocate by the Judges of Jasper, Newton, and Benton Counties.

Continued training is essential to ensuring program and volunteer success. Indiana's program standards and National CASA standards require twelve (12) continuing education hours yearly in order for a CASA volunteer to remain active. Crossroads CASA will assist volunteers in obtaining twelve hours in-service training throughout the year. However, if a volunteer is unable to attend specific in-service training, but is able to participate in relevant programming on his or her own. Crossroads CASA may count those hours towards the twelve hour requirement if approved by the Director. Volunteers are responsible for having such in-service authorized by the Director prior to attending. Volunteers may also be asked to provide documentation that the volunteer attended the programming. Indiana State Office and National CASA offer additional training opportunities.

### **Professional Conduct**

Ultimate responsibility for all CASA cases rest with the Director. However, the advocate also represents Crossroads CASA. What an advocate does or says in the community and courtroom reflects on the program. Please try to always conduct yourself in a manner that reflects favorably on Crossroads CASA program.

### **Dress Code**

Advocates should be dressed appropriately for court and all CASA related meetings. Please do not wear jeans, shorts, tank tops, t-shirts, pajamas, sweat pants, scrubs, or anything improper for CASA related events. Please direct any attire questions to the Director.

### **Gift Giving**

Advocates cannot personally give money, gifts, gift cards, or materials to any party of the case. There will be a time during that year that giving a gift will be appropriate, like birthdays. These gifts will be given by the CASA program or some other agency or program. They will not come from the advocate personally. This does not prohibit the advocate from giving a greeting card. If a party of a case has a special request for material objects or need, please contact the Director. A 501-C3 Non-Profit board may be able to help with a particular request if deemed appropriate.

### **Providing Direct Services**

Advocates are prohibited from providing direct services such as, but not limited to: transporting any party of the case, intervening in domestic disputes, providing counseling, giving legal advice, offering to provide funds for food or other necessities, taking a child or any other party to their personal residence or employment, and making placement arrangements for a child.

### **Providing Direct Services Continued**

Volunteers are facilitators; volunteers advocate for the direct services agencies to provide these services to the children and families.

### **Transportation Policy**

Transportation by volunteers of any party of the case in their personal vehicles during the course of performing their duties and responsibilities of a CASA is not permitted.

### **Public Speaking/Media**

Volunteers are encouraged to speak in a positive manner about the CASA program in general throughout the community and online. However, inquiries concerning Crossroads CASA, its policies, practices, or clients should be referred to the Director. Advocates are prohibited from making any statements to the media or online involving the program or on behalf of the program.

### **Social Media/ Communication**

Volunteers may not create social networking sites or groups regarding CASA or on behalf of the CASA program. Statements concerning any case are not permitted in any way on any type of online sight. This includes all social media sites, blogs, Twitter, websites, online forums, etc. Statements include but not limited to: announcing that you are visiting a child, where the visit is taking place, frustrations with parties of the case, or frustrations with the CASA program. Online statements cannot be made under anonymously or assumed names. It is encouraged that social media is taken very seriously as an advocate, you are representing Crossroads CASA.

Online communication with any party of the case, besides e-mail, is not permitted. You may “friend” a party of a case once it is closed, but may not befriend any party while the case is ongoing. This also goes for personal/private messages on social media sights. Even when deleted, those messages are archived on the provider’s server which puts the program at risk.

Advocates and staff may not post photos of parties of the case on media sites, including after case closure due to confidentiality. The advocates also need to be aware of their own pictures online and make sure that they are all in a professional manner. Rule of thumb, if an advocate is looking up information on a child or parent, most likely at some point, the child or parent will look up the advocate’s information too. Please remove any degrading posts, pictures, etc that may hinder the advocate’s ability to come across as a professional and respectable adult.

Advocates should be very cautious of text messages being communication between themselves and parties of a case. Text messages can easily be misconstrued or misinterpreted. Text messages can be used in court as written record so advocates always need to be shielded on what they say.

It is best practice to use a confidentiality statement at the bottom of electronic messages.

### **Social Media/ Communication Continued**

Dropbox or online tools that share documents shall never be used or documentation placed upon due to possible breach of confidentiality.

Advocate e-mail addresses should never be shared accounts. Only the advocate shall have access to them as e-mails from the Director or other parties of the case cannot be made privy to others.

Any breach of confidentiality or misuse of social media or media of any kind may result in disciplinary action which can lead up to termination from the CASA program. This includes inappropriate items on personal social media pages.

### **Personal Involvement with Legal/Welfare System**

Advocates must immediately notify the program if the volunteer is charged with or convicted of a criminal offense, or becomes involved in any other court proceeding which might cause a conflict of interest or adversely affect the ability to advocate for a child. This includes notifying the program if the volunteer or any member of the volunteer's immediate family becomes involved in a case with allegations of child abuse or neglect.

### **Communication with Parties**

Advocates are prohibited from giving counseling; legal advice; misrepresentation the role or position of a volunteer; or engaging with any ex-parte conversation with a judge. If a parent has an attorney, contact the attorney before talking to the parent for permission. A parent may have a pending charge which the attorney would not want their client communicating to the parent without legal representation.

### **Conflict of Interest**

Advocates' effectiveness and unbiased standing in court depends on them maintaining professional relationships with children and families at all times. Advocates should not become personally involved with the children and their families. This includes not being related to or developing intimate, social or other nonprofessional relationships with any person connected to the case or being employed in a position that may result in a conflict of interest. If a conflict of interest arises please contact the Director immediately.

### **Decline Appointment, Withdraw, or Request Assistance**

Advocates that recognize that they may not have the time or ability to effectively advocate for a child should decline to be appointed, withdraw, or request assistance. Withdraws need to be made in writing and with much consideration and Crossroads CASA strives on remaining that one constant person in the child's life throughout a case.

### **Confidentially**

Advocates must respect children and families rights to privacy in regard to personal information. Disclosure or verification of case information shall not be made to anyone who does not have a professional and legal reason for receiving such information. No information shall be released to anyone not authorized to receive it, without the express written and dated consent of the party. Confidential information shall only be shared with parties of the case with caution. Case records and notes shall be secured and kept private and inaccessible to the public view. Discussion of case-related materials is not to be held in hallways, elevators, or other public places. Be aware parties may state they will not repeat statements or “off the record”. This is not a wise to have conversations “off record” as it may be used against the volunteer at a later time.

It is the CASA volunteer’s job to transmit the information it collects to the court and all parties of the case (when applicable). It is important to let all parties know at the beginning of the case that you may repeat whatever they may say in court.

No one outside of CASA personnel may have access to a CASA case record without a court order. Even if given a subpoena, do not hand over or give any case information without checking with the Director prior. Copies of the CASA Report to Court are provided to all parties of the case. This would include the DCS case manager, attorneys, and to the parents or their attorneys. Foster parents, service providers, and other affiliated with the case that are not considered parties are not entitled to copies of the CASA report unless ordered by the court.

Any confidential materials received from another individual or agency may not be disclosed to anyone except the CASA program Director or others by court order or written consent of the party involved.

### **Duty to Disclose: Exceptions to Confidentiality**

Advocates are not protected by privilege, like a doctor-patient or lawyer-client relationship. It is the advocate’s responsibility to transmit the information they collect to the parties of the court.

Advocates have a duty to immediately disclose in instances where the advocate suspects (1) Child abuse and/or neglect (2) Someone may harm him/herself or others. Such disclosure should be to the Department of Child Services at (800) 800-5556 or police. Advocates that have a question about disclosure should immediately call the Director.

### **Evaluations**

Advocates will be evaluated at least annually. Periodic evaluations help Crossroads CASA sustain long and mutually productive relationships with our advocates. Evaluations may also come as the result of a sequence of verbal or written warnings. Advocates are encouraged to use

### **Evaluations Continued**

the evaluation sessions to discuss areas of concern and to make suggestions about improving the program. All evaluations will be maintained in the advocate's file.

Yearly evaluations on the CASA staff will also be conducted.

### **Complaints and Grievances**

Every effort should be made to solve problems cooperatively and informally before presenting them as a formal grievance. Should informal efforts fail, the following policy and procedure is set forth in order to provide an outlet for complaints and a systematic means to resolve grievances. All complaints will receive thoughtful consideration and will be discussed.

Complaints and grievance may arise from external (outside the immediate program) or internal (within the program).

External: Because advocates are involved with work that impacts the future lives of children and families, this emotionally charged work evokes a wide range of feelings from all the parties involved. It is therefore common and expected that there may be criticism from the parties. Should a complaint arise from someone outside the Crossroads CASA program, the Director will discuss the complaint with the advocate. The Director is responsible for deciding if the complaint has any validity and may request a written statement from the party initiating that complaint. In addition, the Director, with the advocate from the Judge, may determine what action, if any, should be taken.

Internal: When an advocate wishes to make a complaint with a policy, practice, condition or Director's decision, it is encouraged that the volunteer should first try to discuss the matter informally with the Director. If this is not an option or the problem is not resolved to the advocate's satisfaction, he or she should contact Judge John D. Potter from Jasper Circuit Court to discuss the issue.

### **Monthly Logs/Visitation**

When accepting a case, the advocate must visit the child(ren) at least once a month face-to-face. An advocate may choose to visit more frequently than that, but state and national CASA requires at least one face-to-face visit per month. An advocate must keep track of all party communications, record them, and turn them in monthly to the Director on a document called the Contact Log.

### **Indiana Code of Ethics**

This Code of Ethics provides Indiana GAL/CASA program and advocates with guidelines for professional behavior and ethical conduct. The Indiana State Office of GAL/CASA shall not be held liable for the actions of affiliate programs or advocates.

#### **Conduct:**

1. GAL/CASA programs and volunteers will abide by this Code of Ethics and all laws and regulations governing their activities. Each GAL/CASA program is expected to train their staff and volunteers on the Code of Ethics, provide them with a copy, and have them sign an acknowledgment that they have read and received the Code of Ethics and will abide by it.
2. GAL/CASA programs and volunteers will uphold the credibility and dignity of the GAL/CASA concept by conducting all business in an honest, fair, professional, and humane manner.
3. Employees and volunteers of GAL/CASA programs will not use their authority inappropriately, nor condone any illegal acts or unethical practices related to their program or community.
4. GAL/CASA programs and volunteers will not use their program relationship for inappropriate personal, professional or financial gain.
5. GAL/CASA programs and volunteers will avoid any action that could adversely affect the confidence of the public in the integrity of the GAL/CASA concept.
6. GAL/CASA programs and volunteers will not initiate, permit or participate in any *ex parte* communications with the judge outside the presence of the parties concerning a pending or impending proceeding.
7. GAL/CASA programs and volunteers will not practice, condone, facilitate or participate in any form of discrimination on the basis of race, color, sex, sexual orientation, age, religion, national origin, marital status, political belief, or mental or physical handicap.
8. GAL/CASA programs will take necessary steps to avoid conflicts of interest on cases. GAL/CASA programs will ensure that each volunteer exercises independent judgment on behalf of a child and advocates solely for whatever is in the best interest of the child. GAL/CASA programs and volunteers will resist influences and pressures that interfere with impartial judgment and will report honestly and impartially to the court on what is in the best interests of the child. In order to avoid conflicts of interest and even the appearance of impropriety, the GAL/CASA program shall not allow employees of the Court or Department of Child Services to serve as a volunteer. Foster parents and employees of service providers that provide services to the Department of Child Services also should not serve as volunteers absent special circumstances that are approved by the Director. A GAL/CASA program shall not appoint any volunteer to a case when the volunteer has prior involvement with a family or with the circumstances surrounding the

### **Code of Ethics Continued**

case unless there is full disclosure of the potential conflict to all parties and any perceived or actual conflict is waived.

#### **Confidentiality:**

9. GAL/CASA programs and volunteers will respect the right to privacy of all individuals. GAL/CASA programs will maintain strict confidentiality of all information related to a case. GAL/CASA programs will take all reasonable steps to ensure that volunteers also maintain strict confidentiality. GAL/CASA programs will provide training to volunteers about confidentiality and will have volunteers sign a confidentiality statement and/or policy. Neither a GAL/CASA program nor volunteers will disclose confidential information relating to a case to any person who is not a party to the case except in reports to the court and as provided by law or court order.
10. Persons affiliated with GAL/CASA programs will not use confidential information obtained through their work with GAL/CASA for personal benefit.

#### **Knowledge and Understanding:**

11. Individuals working in GAL/CASA programs as staff or volunteers must be trained in the court and child welfare systems; child abuse and neglect issues; relevant state and federal laws; permanency planning and family preservation; cultural awareness; confidentiality and ethics; and the roles and responsibilities of a GAL/CASA volunteer. A GAL/CASA program that appoints volunteers in divorce/custody/visitation, paternity, juvenile delinquency, adoption, or guardianship cases must provide additional training in these areas.
12. GAL/CASA programs and volunteers must respect a child's inherent right to grow up with dignity in a safe and permanent environment that meets that child's best interests

#### **State Office Certification:**

13. GAL/CASA programs seeking certification from the Indiana State Office of GAL/CASA must operate in accordance with this Code of Ethics and the Program Standards of the Indiana State Office of GAL/CASA. Pursuant to I.C. 33-24-6-4, only GAL or CASA programs that are certified by the Supreme Court are eligible for funding from the State Office.
14. Affiliation with the Indiana State Office of GAL/CASA may be used only for purposes in accordance with the goals and purposes of the Indiana State Office of GAL/CASA.

#### **Compliance:**

15. The Director of the Indiana State Office of GAL/CASA shall monitor compliance with this Code of Ethics in conjunction with the Indiana Supreme Court Advisory Commission on GAL/CASA.



## **Role and Responsibilities of a CASA Volunteer**

A CASA volunteer is a trained child advocate sworn in by the court to represent the best interest of children who are abused and neglected and are active cases in the court system. The CASA volunteer investigates the child's circumstances, provides fact-based information, and makes recommendations to the court while becoming a source of support for the child. The advocate needs to be at least 21 years of age, clean background, complete an initial interview, and a 30 hour initial training.

The CASA program is a court program, and works closely with the social workers, therapists, attorneys, care providers and other professionals involved in a child's case. CASA volunteers work under the director supervision of the CSAA Director to further the child's welfare and to expedite the case through the system so the child has a safe, permanent home. This could mean returning to the parent's care, adoption, appointment of a legal guardian, or some other permanent living arrangement that satisfies the court and fulfills the child's needs.

Responsibilities of the CASA volunteer include:

- 1) Conducting an independent investigation
  - a. Reviewing all relevant documents, including those of DCS, police, court, medical, and school.
  - b. Conducting direct interviews with the child, parents, social workers, relatives, school personnel, and others that have knowledge of the facts in the situation.
  - c. Maintain complete written records about the case, including a log of appointments, interviews, and information gathered about the child, records reviewed, and time spent on the case.
  - d. Report any incidents of child abuse or neglect to the program director and the appropriate authorities immediately.
  - e. Determine if a permanent plan has been created for the child, and whether "reasonable efforts" were made to provide services to the child and family. Is this plan appropriate and in the best interest of the child?
- 2) Advocate for the best interest of the child:
  - a. Utilize as many factors as possible in making this recommendation, including:
    - i. Current age and sense of time
    - ii. Level of maturity
    - iii. Culture and ethnicity
    - iv. Degree of attachment to family members, including siblings
    - v. What situation would best provide continuity, consistency and sense of belonging
    - vi. Monitor the case by in-person contact with the child at least once every thirty days, sufficient to have in-depth knowledge of the case and make fact-based recommendations to the court.



### **Responsibilities Continued**

- vii. Participate in any planning or treatment team meetings involving the child in order to keep information on the child's permanent plan. Seek cooperative solutions; if possible monitor the development and/or revisions of a case plan, ensuring inclusion of specific tasks with target dates for completion. Review the service plan with workers and ask questions to ensure all the child's needs are being met by the plan and may suggest additional services.
- 3) Be a representative for the child:
  - a. Assure the child's best interests are being represented at every stage of the case.
  - b. Attend all court hearings.
  - c. Make a written recommendation to the court on what decision is best for the child.
  - d. Urge the court, through written reports, to enter specific and clear orders for evaluation, assessment, services and treatment for the child and the child's family.
  - e. Point out concerns about the case to court
  - f. Help the child understand the court process
  - g. Provide monthly documentation of the case activities to the CASA Director
  - h. Remain actively involved in the case until formally discharged by the court. Once a case terminates and/or a CASA volunteer is no longer assigned to it, all notes and other associated paperwork must be returned to the CASA office immediately. Crossroads CASA requires all files and paperwork to be returned to the CASA office within seven (7) working days.
  - i. Abide by all laws and regulations governing activities; conduct all business in an honest, fair, and professional manner.
    - i. Respect the right to privacy when conducting interviews by keeping information that would identify parties involved in CASA cases confidential.

### **Guidelines for Contact with Children**

- 1) Visits and/or contact with the child should occur once every thirty (30) days, but it is highly encouraged to see the child more often.
- 2) Never take a child home with you or keep overnight. Do not transport the child or any party of the case in personal vehicles.
- 3) Conduct questions in a professional manner:
  - a. Do not probe or introduce the specifics of abuse. Be especially careful when discussing issues of sexual abuse and other potential criminal cases.
  - b. Explain your role as a CASA volunteer in words that children can understand. Communicate in a manner appropriate for their age and developmental level.

### **Guidelines for Contact Continued**

- c. Explain to the child why they were removed from their home and keep them informed about case events.
- 4) Visit the child prior to any hearing that the child will be attending. Explain what is expected to occur and explore the child's current reactions and feelings regarding the upcoming hearing.
- 5) Reflect child's attachments to their parents. Remain neutral and non-judgmental about their parents. Do not express your opinion of the parents even if asked.
- 6) Reflect child's feelings without evaluating them and let them know it is okay to have unpleasant and negative feelings.
- 7) Treat each child with respect. Do not talk down to them or criticize them.
- 8) Do not make promises that you cannot keep. Keep the promises you make.
- 9) Tell the child what happened is not their fault. With older children who have been in therapeutic treatment and/or state care, confirm the need to accept past problems and assume responsibility for their future.
- 10) Prior to confirming with children what you will advocate for, confer with the treatment team (therapist, house parents, case managers, etc.) regarding concerns children express to you and other case matters.
- 11) Know your case will have a beginning, middle, and an end. Plan on being in the children's life only a limited time.

### **Guidelines for Contact with Parents and Family Members**

- 1) Explain your role as a CASA in language parents and family members can understand. Do your best to develop good working relationships with both parents and family members.
- 2) Focus on obtaining information. Find the strengths of the parents and family members, evaluate the needs of the family, and strive to be non-judgmental.
- 3) Explain confidentiality; you will gather information about the case, report facts, and make recommendations to the court. Anything the parents or family members may do can be used as facts in the court recommendations.
- 4) Listen and respond with respect avoiding emotional remarks.
- 5) Respond the questions. When you do not know the answer, say you do not. If the questions are about legal action, encourage them to contact their attorney or DCS case manager. As a CASA, you are not legally able to give out any type of legal advice. Confer with the program supervisor to assist you in you are uncertain about the answer to a question.
- 6) Avoid asking leading questions and making emotional remarks
- 7) Use reinforcement such as "I see: or nod of your head to encourage responsiveness.

### **Guidelines for Contact with Family Continued**

- 8) Begin with general, opened ended questions as “Tell me about...” Use closed questions that can be answered with “yes” or “no” or a short answer when you need specific information or when you need you are not receiving responses to more general questions
- 9) Strive to understand your attitude and behaviors, then try to understand the attitudes and behaviors of the parents, family members, and foster parents. Be completely aware of your own personal “non-verbal” communications.
- 10) Be clear about what is to occur next. Do not make promises or state you will do something and then not do it.
- 11) After contact with parents or family members, carefully document the facts you obtained, and observation, actions, questions, and plans. Use objective statements that describe a specific fact or behavior. Do no make interpretations, diagnostic conclusions or judgments.
- 12) File your notes and any records you obtain in an orderly fashion.

### **Guidelines for Working with Professional Parties of the Case**

- 1) When first contacting an agency, first introduce yourself as the CASA and offer a copy of your court order. If the person/agency is unfamiliar with the CASA program, explain the role of the CASA.
- 2) Receive all records in person or have the party fax documentation to the CASA fax
- 3) Document all contacts and conversations in your case notes by entering the dates, type of contact, agency, and individual names. Enter factorial highlights of conversations and factual observations.
- 4) Maintain confidentially. With contacts other than social services, information provided to that necessary to state your request for information.
- 5) Consider the needs and schedule of the other party. Be brief and flexible around busy schedules. State the reason you are contacting them, provide details only if necessary, and present most important information first.
- 6) Arrange visits at least 24 hours in advance.
- 7) Watch for opportunities to express appreciation and praise and do so. Specify what was done or said, how it is contributed, and why you appreciate it.
- 8) Practice good listening skills, affirm, and summarize significant statements.
- 9) Be certain important information received from services providers is known to the case manager and Director. Open communication between DCS and CASA should always be used.
- 10) Contact the case manager and CASA Director is there is an issue or concern which arises at a child’s placement.
- 11) Remember that patience is a virtue and persistence – appropriately expressed – is also a virtue.

12) Report any suspected abuse or neglect or immediate danger to 1-800-800-5556 or 911.

### **Child's File**

The CASA advocate must keep and maintain complete and accurate records for all children served while a case is on-going. Volunteers must maintain a copy of the on-going case in a safe, locked place as these are closed and confidential cases. Once the case is complete, all information shall be returned to the CASA Director within seven (7) working days. A case record which an advocate should involve:

- 1) Information on the child and family.
- 2) Background case information
- 3) Contact logs
- 4) All court reports – Including CASA submitted reports
- 5) The original court order
- 6) Any pertinent information regarding the case
- 7) All notes, e-mails, text messages between the CASA and parties of the case
- 8) Dismissal papers

### **Volunteer Case Assignment**

The CASA Director will assign a CASA volunteer to a case upon the request of the court. An advocate will not be assigned to more than two sibling groups unless special circumstances warrant assignment. Advocates shall not be assigned to cases in which there are conflicts of interest. Possible conflicts include, but not limited to, if the volunteer is; related to anyone involved in the case, employed by an agency with involvement in the case or biased by prior knowledge of the case or persons involved.

Once a volunteer accepts a case, he or she must sign an oath of acceptance to be maintained in the case file. The volunteer will receive any documentation necessary to manage his or her case. The volunteer must visit with the child at least once every thirty (30) days in-person. However volunteers will have regular in-person contact with children sufficient to have in depth knowledge of the case and make fact-based recommendations to the court.

Volunteers must submit a court report at all hearings. All exceptions to court reports can only be made by the Director prior to a hearing. All court reports, documentation, and correspondence shall be reviewed by the director ten (10) working days before the scheduled court hearing. The CASA Director cannot alter CASA reports and recommendations without knowledge of the volunteer.

Crossroads CASA has access to legal counsel and may make an attorney available to the volunteer for the purpose of answering legal questions related to his or her specific case or general questions as to federal, state, tribal laws, court procedure, and justice system if deemed necessary by the director.

### **Volunteer Case Assignment Continued**

At the conclusion of the volunteer's involvement with the case, including resignation by or termination of the volunteer, the volunteer shall return the entire case file to the director within seven (7) working days. If case information is not returned, the director may have a court order implemented for their return.

### **Dismissal and Discipline**

The purpose of discipline is to correct volunteer misconduct or to improve performance. Depending on the circumstances, misconduct will result in disciplinary action, which may include a verbal warning, written warning, or dismissal. Verbal and written warnings will be administered by the Director and a record of such will be placed in the volunteer's file.

Dismissal of a volunteer is the responsibility of the Director, who deserves the right to dismiss "at will," the final decision, which, cannot be appealed. Immediate dismissal will take place only in the most serious circumstances. Grounds for dismissal may include, but not limited to:

- 1) Taking action without Crossroads CASA or court approval that endangers the child or is outside the role of the volunteer
- 2) Knowingly and intentionally violating a program policy, court rule or law
- 3) Demonstrating gross misconduct or insubordination
- 4) Theft of property or misuse of program equipment or materials
- 5) Mistreatment or inappropriate conduct towards clients, families, co-workers or cooperating agency personnel
- 6) Failure to accept assignments over a period of twelve months
- 7) Breach of confidentiality
- 8) Failure to perform assigned duties
- 9) Conflict of interest that cannot be resolved
- 10) Falsification of application materials or misrepresentation of facts
- 11) Falsification of any materials included in court reports
- 12) Failure to report significant case information to the court
- 13) Criminal activities
- 14) Existence of child abuse or neglect allegations
- 15) Being under the influence of alcohol or drugs while performing the duties of an advocate
- 16) Lying or falsifying records or documentation
- 17) Participating in ex-parte communications
- 18) The CASA program does not accept applicants for staff or volunteers if they have been convicted of, or have charges pending for, a felon or misdemeanor involving a sex offense, child abuse or neglect, or related acts that would pose risks to children or to the program's credibility.

### **Resignation or Leave of Absence**

Advocates may at any time, for whatever reason, decide to resign from their volunteer services with Crossroads CASA. It is requested that the volunteer resign in writing to the Director. The letter will be placed in the advocate's file.

Should a volunteer want to become active again without repeating the initial training, then he or she must contact the Crossroads CASA program within one (1) year of resigning. They may have to participate in an interview with the Director. If the volunteer fails to contact the program within one (1) year, he or she must repeat the initial training and may also have to go through the screening process again.

Once an advocate's case is dismissed, he or she may choose not to be immediately appointed to another case. He or she should notify the Director of such either orally or in writing. An advocate may be on a "leave of absence" status for two (2) years. However, such volunteer must continue to participate in educational trainings. Failure to do so will result in an automatic dismissal.

### **CASA Safety Plan**

Each advocate must consider basic safety issues. If you are making visits, especially to homes, always tell someone approximately where you are going and when you believe you will return. If possible, take a cell phone. Always have identification papers including the CASA appointment and ID badge.

If you have been told there is possible danger in the home, arrange to have the CASA Director to go with you. You may also ask hostile people to the CASA office for meetings. Please let the Director know if you wish to make such an appointment. Another consideration in dealing with parents is to ask the parent's attorney for help. The attorney may arrange for you to meet in their office. If this occurs, please also have the CASA Director with you.

Usually the CASA Director will know when special precautions should be taken before you are assigned to a case. However, should you ever go out on a visit and feel threatened, please leave the situation and if you cannot leave call 911.

If you suspect or witness further abuse or neglect you are obligated to call 1-800-800-5556, the case manager, and the CASA Director. Do not transport any party of the case, and do not carry any type of weapon in your car or on you during visits.

### **Acknowledgement of Receipt**

#### **Policy and Procedure Manual**

I, \_\_\_\_\_, have read the Crossroads CASA Program Policy and Procedure Manual. I understand its contents and agree to the following policies and procedures as set forth in it.

#### **Indiana GAL/CASA Code of Ethics**

I, \_\_\_\_\_, do hereby state that I have received, read, and understand the Indiana Code of Ethics. As an advocate for the Crossroads CASA Program, I will abide by the aforementioned Code of Ethics.

#### **Confidentiality Statement**

I, \_\_\_\_\_, promise to respect the right to privacy to those individuals related to cases I may be assigned to as an advocate for the Crossroads CASA Program. I further swear to keep in strict confidence information related to the case and will not share it with anyone who is not a party to the proceedings except in reports to the court and as provided by law or court orders. I shall not give anyone copies of my case file unless permission is granted prior by the CASA Director. I will not use confidential information obtained through my work as a CASA volunteer for my personal benefit. I will also keep in confidence any care information I may be privy to during the entire training process and during my career as a CASA volunteer.

So Signed this Day: \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_

Advocate's Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Printed Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Director's Signature: \_\_\_\_\_